THE CHRISTIAN KEEPSAKE,

AND

MISSIONARY ANNUAL.

EDITED BY THE REV. WILLIAM ELLIS.

1836.

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AND W. JACKSON, NEW YORK.
Mr. Wilberforce was born at Kingston-upon-Hull, in the county of York, August 24th, 1759, at the same period, and almost the same year, with Mr. Pitt, Lord Grenville, Mr. H. Thornton, Lord Sidmouth, Sir George Rose, the late Bishop of Winchester, Welbore Ellis, (Lord Clifden,) T. Babington, formerly member for Leicester, and other leading persons of his time. His natural character was, perhaps, the most purely benevolent that has been known in any public man; certainly the most benevolent of all who have had any claims to talent as statesmen, and made any impression upon their age. And when the principles and feelings of genuine Christianity were superadded to his natural amiableness, so as to guard it from cowardice, from yielding to solicitations on the part of the world, and acting against the dictates of duty, he became one of the most devoted, consistent, loveable public persons of his day. For a short time after his entrance on public life in 1780, as member for Hull, he was, like too many others of his rank, worldly, and careless as to religion; admired indeed by every one—his company sought—admitted into all the fashionable societies and clubs—but in danger of sinking, as many other amiable men have done, under the fascination
of flatteries, and folly, and sins. The writer of these lines remembers that Mr. Wilberforce told him, that, upon the change which took place in his religious views and feelings, he had to withdraw his name at once from six or seven of these gay and dangerous associations.

The manner in which the religious change thus referred to was gradually produced deserves notice. It was early after his commencement of public life, probably in 1782 or 1783, that he made a tour of the continent, accompanied by the late learned and venerable Dr. Isaac Milner, afterwards, by his recommendation to Mr. Pitt, (the only favour he ever asked, I have heard him say,) raised to the Deanery of Carlisle. The conversation of this eminent divine, their reading together of the Greek Testament, and afterwards his perusing Doddridge’s Rise and Progress of Religion, at the Dean’s recommendation, led to a thorough perception of the real nature and bearings of Christianity, of the claims of Almighty God upon his creatures, of the evil and extent of sin, of the disorder of the heart of man, of the great redemption wrought out for a fallen world through the incarnation of the only begotten Son of God, of the need of the grace of the Holy Spirit for illumination and sanctification, and the consequent life of devotedness and consistency to which a Christian is called and disposed by the Gospel.

For a description of such an inward change and conversion of the soul, I refer the reader to Mr. Wilberforce’s own work on Christianity, published in 1797, (which has gone through nearly twenty editions, and is one, in fact, of the most masterly productions in the whole compass of English literature,) where a detail will be found of the points of difference between a merely philanthropic man without heartfelt Christianity, and the same character purified, strengthened, guarded, directed, ennoble bled by Christian principle.
The first burst of this religious change upon his former circle of associates excited a surprise, and afterwards a grief, at such an amiable young man's being lost, as it was termed, as can scarcely now be credited. His firmness, however, and consistency, his admirable temper, his discretion in urging upon others his sentiments, together with the talents of almost every kind most requisite for a senator, which gradually developed themselves, soon recovered or retained the regard of those who moved with him in public life. The impression he made in the House of Commons was, I am informed, at times unparalleled: a voice sweet and harmonious, an exuberant and ready eloquence, a passion which gently kindled as he went on, a genuine and delicate wit, a mild and harmless satire, a delivery elegant and easy, a command of language and enunciation correct and copious, united to excite admiration, whilst philanthropy, beam

No opportunity was lost by Mr. Wilberforce to impress on his friend the importance of Christianity as he himself perceived and felt it. Pitt used to say, "Every thing sits so well on Wilberforce, that even his religion appears becoming in him."

The influence of Mr. Prettyman, Mr. Pitt's private secretary, and Mr. Dundas, was considered by Mr. Wilberforce as unfriendly with respect to his views of religion. "Prettyman," said the minister on one occasion to Mr. Wilberforce, "gives me a totally different view of these things." The hurry of public life, the increasing futility of Mr. Wilberforce's mind, and his abstraction from party politics, (at first Mr. Wilberforce was one of the constant and most powerful supporters of Mr. Pitt's administration, which he continued in a certain measure to be during Mr. Pitt's life,) withdrew the two friends from each other by degrees; and when Mr. Wilberforce married, in 1797, the intimacy, as I conjecture, ceased. But to the close of life, Mr. Wilberforce always spoke of him with affection, as an old friend, and with the most unqualified admiration of his talents, integrity, and love of his country. He began, "A Life of Mr. Pitt," intending to make it a vehicle of observations on the times in which they both lived; but it was never prosecuted. I remember his lamenting the view of the publication of Sunday papers, when they might have been discouraged with the utmost ease; whereas the one error of despising them allowed the evil to take root, and to become one of the national sins of Great Britain. And on another occasion, I recollect Mr. Wilberforce saying, that he once laboured for hours in endeavouring to convince Mr. Pitt of the real spirituality of Christianity, and of the value of those clergymen whose
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He continued intimate with Mr. Pitt for some years after his election for Yorkshire, going down with that minister often to his country seat, and unbending from the fatigues of the senate. His estimate of Mr. Pitt's talents was high; he considered him (I mean deliberately, and towards the close of his life) as the most surprising man of his day, for comprehension of mind, promptitude, power of arrangement, intuition into every subject, eloquence in debate, genuine devotedness to his country, kindness of temper, simplicity of manners in private life, and pure classical taste. Of this last, I remember Mr. Wilberforce once gave us a proof; that on one occasion, when Lord Grenville, Lord Melville (then Mr. Dundas,) and himself met together at dinner for the consideration of a political question, the incidental reference to a passage in Virgil diverted their attention, till the whole evening passed in a literary and classical disquisition, and the business before them was adjourned.

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It was at the suggestion of this minister that Mr. Wilberforce, in 1787 or 1788, was encouraged to bring first before parliament the question of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. They were at Mr. Pitt's country retreat, (Holrood House, I think was the name,) when Granville Sharpe's proceedings in favour of the slaves, and some other public occurrences relating to them, became the topic of conversation. Pitt said, "Why should you not be the man to bring the whole question before parliament?" This led to that train of measures which terminated in the abolition of the slave trade under Lord Grenville's administration in 1807, and the emancipation of the slaves in the colonies themselves in the year 1833, just before his death. The writer has heard many distinguished members say, that some of Mr. Wilberforce's speeches on the slave trade were of the highest species of eloquence— instructive, convincing, persuasive, powerful, overwhelming; and that also one of Mr. Pitt's most admirable speeches was delivered in 1791, on the same topic. Pitt said, "Why should you not be the man to bring the whole question before parliament?"

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It may fairly be said, upon reflecting on Mr. Wilberforce's labours for this cause, including the thirty-seven years that he was in parliament after he brought it forward, and the nine years of retirement afterwards, during which he continued to aid and direct in the conduct of it, that there has been no statesman in our memory who has proposed to himself so great an object, pursued it with such perseverance, and been crowned during his own lifetime with such complete success. Other names should, indeed, be associated with his own on this subject—Sharpe, Clarkson, Buxton, Lushington, and eminently Z. Macaulay, but the leader, in and out of parliament, was Wilberforce.

His extreme benevolence contributed largely to this success. I have heard him say, that it was one of his constant rules, on this question especially, never to provoke an adversary—to allow him fully sincerity and purity of motive—to abstain from irritating expressions—to avoid even such political attacks as would indispose his opponents for his great cause. In fact, the benignity, the gentleness, the kind-heartedness of the man, disarmed the bitterest foes. Not only on this question did he restrain himself, but generally. Once he had been called during a whole debate, by a considerable speaker of the opposition, "the religious member," in a kind of scorn. The impropriety had been checked by the interference of the house. Mr. Wilberforce told me afterwards, that he was much inclined to have retorted by calling his opponent "the irreligious member," but that he refrained, as it would have been a returning of evil for evil.

I may as well insert here another observation of Mr. Wilberforce, which was, that he had constantly observed that public men would never attend to him about religion, unless they found he knew as much as themselves on other topics.

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He was accustomed to prepare himself for every great debate not by composing or writing his speech, but by examining most closely and deliberately the question which was to be discussed, and calling in two or three friends, perhaps, to consult with.

His constant attendance to his parliamentary duties struck every one. Wilberforce was always in his place, discharging to his utmost the obligations of a statesman and legislator.

He was never in office. Early in his career he disavowed party, and resolved to follow his own unbiassed conviction on each question. In the first French war he supported generally Mr. Pitt, but on one occasion he moved an amendment to the address, and headed the opposition to the minister, (about the year 1795 or 1796,) because he thought further endeavours for peace should have been made. I remember the astonishment this step created: in Yorkshire it almost lost him his seat.

To go on with the parliamentary recollections: A growing influence in the house was the result of his consistent, able, wise, sincere, engaging course of conduct. The writer was present, thirty-six years since, when the coarsest attack was made on him by an opposition member, soon after the publication of his book. Mr. Canning then defended him. Towards the close of his career such attacks were not often attempted, and if they were, were received with indignation by the whole house. Indeed, in 1813, at the period of the last renewal of the East India Charter, he was more than once listened to with attention for three hours on the necessity and duty of communicating Christianity to our native fellow-subjects in India.

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a silent revolution in the general estimate of religion in the House of Commons. His book, which, when published in 1797, was scouted and maligned on all hands, was very generally admired and esteemed in 1824, when he retired from public life, and the sentiments urged in it admitted to be true. His speeches were never well reported, any more than Mr. Pitt's; they were too refined, elegant, rapid, philosophical, religious, for the reporters of that day; and he never corrected them. One or two published by himself, are just as defective.

I may as well say of his book, that it was published because he found it impossible to give his political friends a just conception of his real views of Christianity. They had some notions that he was peculiarly religious; but no explicit information. The book was dictated. He first arranged well his plan, then thought much over each topic; but when his ideas were in order, and his mind warmed, he poured out the chapters like a river's flow. It is one of the most eloquent books in the English language. The first two editions, of 2000 copies each, he gave away. The members of both houses of parliament first received presents. The effect was electric over the nation. The most prejudiced and irreverent paused at the beauty of the style and the force of the arguments. The incidental topics discussed were much admired by judges of composition; that upon the elections, for example, and the thoughts on the evidences, all admitted it deserved reading. It contributed very considerably to that revival of effective Christianity which the last forty years have witnessed.

The wisdom of his gradual retreat from parliamentary duties cannot be observed. For some years before he finally left the scene, (which was in 1824,) he had resigned his seat for a time, and represented the small borough of Bramber. This he quieted in time also. He sunk back into his family circle
at the age of sixty-five; with a reputation untarnished during an entire course of forty-four years, and with powers still capable of delighting his domestic circle and personal friends.

The following brief note addressed to me at this period, will evince the spirit in which he bade farewell to the labours and eclat of public life.

Near Uxbridge, February 12th, 1825.

"My dear Sir,

"I am vexed at myself for being tardy in sending an annual subscription, which I can truly say I should be glad to augment to ten times its amount, thinking myself honoured in being allowed to contribute towards so excellent a purpose. I am rather pleased to have a plea for writing to you, because I have thereby the opportunity of communicating a determination, which I had rather you should learn from myself than from the newspaper. It is, that I am about to retire from the House of Commons. My medical adviser would permit me to go to the house only when (he weather should be genial, adding, that if I should bring on such a complaint (pulmonary) as I had last year, he doubted if I had strength to stand it. Thus I had to set against any little good I might hope to do by the occasional attendance of one session, the risk at least of losing all the benefit which my family, if not a wider circle, might derive from my prolonged continuance in private life. Let me have your prayers, my dear Sir, that I may be enabled to employ the evening of my days to the glory of my unwearied Benefactor.

"May it please God to bless you with a long course of usefulness and comfort.

"I am ever, with cordial esteem and attachment,

"Sincerely and affectionately yours,

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In his domestic circle he had long been the charm of all who approached him. His lovely character attached them with a sort of devotion. His table was almost a public one, so long as he continued his residence at Kensington Gore; (he had first resided in Palace Yard, and then, after his marriage, for many years at Clapham;) but after his removal to the neighbourhood of Edgeware and Hendon, (twelve miles or so from London,) his circle was more select. His kindness to his wife and children, the unbounded repose and affection of his family towards him, and the love which reigned throughout his house, were there to be seen to the greatest advantage.

A friend told me that he found him once in the greatest agitation looking for a despatch which he had mislaid—one of the royal family was waiting for it—he had delayed the search to the last moment—he seemed at last quite vexed and flurried. At this unlucky instant, a disturbance in the nursery overhead occurred. My friend who was with him, said to himself, "for once Wilberforce's temper will give way. He had hardly thought thus, when Mr. Wilberforce turned to him and said, "What a blessing it is to have these dear children—only think what a relief amid other hurries to hear their voices, and know they are well."

Upon his religious habits, the mind of the writer of these recollections delights to dwell. He was a Christian indeed. The elevated and consistent tone of spiritual piety, which he maintained during the whole course of his hurried public life, was sustained by much private prayer, by a religious observance of the rest of the Sabbath, and by study of the Scriptures. His remarks in his family devotions on the passages which he read were generally attractive, new, striking, practical, and in harmony with the spirit of the sacred book. The writer has seen the bible which he used in private—the margins were crowded with annotations, references, critical emendations, and
marks all in pencil, and evidently the work of reference, and love for the sacred book. I remember his expositions dwelt much on the topics of gratitude to God for redemption, of the debt of love we owe, of the happiness of religion, and the misery of a life of sin.

Next to his general consistency and love to the Scriptures, the humility of his character always appeared to the writer remarkable. No ostentation, no courting of applause, no selfishness, no vanity, no display—the modest, shrinking, simple, Christian statesman and friend, always appeared in him. He was in as little measure as possible elated by the love and esteem of the whole civilized world almost, which, long before his death, had been fixed upon him. It required some management to draw him out in conversation. And the nearer you observed him, the more the habit of his mind appeared obviously to be modest and lowly. And, therefore, some of those who only saw him once, might go away disappointed. But if he was lighted up, and in a small circle where he was entirely at his ease, his powers of conversation were prodigious, a natural eloquence was poured out, strokes of gentle playful and satirical humor fell on all sides, and the company were soon absorbed into admiration. It commonly took only one visit, to gain over the most prejudiced stranger.

I hardly know whether it would be worth while particularizing two occasions. He was on a visit to Brighton; the king hearing of it, sent for him one evening, without a moment's notice, to attend at the pavilion. Mr. Wilberforce was so much surprised, that he actually called in the orderly, that he might have the message from the man's own mouth. He hurried on his dress, and went. A large party was assembled, and the king (George IV.) paid him much attention; by degrees he was engaged in conversation, and so fixed the royal circle, that the company did not break up till a late hour—his majesty playfully accusing Mr. Wilberforce of being the occasion.

At another time, he was invited to meet the celebrated Madame de Stael at, I believe, Lord Lansdowne's: there were only two or three guests; one of whom told me that Wilberforce broke out on a suitable topic, leading from it into so eloquent a panegyric of missionaries carrying the gospel to the heathen nations, that the party were rapt in amazement; the conversation afterwards naturally fell into his hands, (such was the expression used to me,) and the evening was altogether delightful.

His particular views of Christian doctrine may be gathered from his work on that subject—they were evangelical, wise, moderate on doubtful questions, and eminently practical. He was no Calvinist, if by that be meant a strong opinion on predestination, and the order of the Divine decrees; but he was a sound heartfelt believer in the revelation of the gospel according to the articles and homilies of the Church of England, of which he was through life a sincere member. I remember, only a few years since, his walking with me up and down his drawing-room some time beyond midnight, discoursing on some of these subjects—his figure is now in my mind—his benevolent eye—his kind considerate manner of speaking—his reverence for Scripture—his address—the pauses he made in his walk, when he had any thing emphatic to say. I recollect one sentiment was, that the passages so frequent in Scripture, importing the unwillingness of the Almighty that the sinner should perish, the invitations addressed to him to return, the remonstrances with him on his unbelief, &c., must be interpreted strictly and literally, or they would appear to be a mockery of man's misery, and to involve the most fearful imputations on the Divine character. Evasions of the force of such passages were, he thought, highly injurious,
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His particular views of Christian doctrine may be gathered from his work on that subject—they were evangelical, wise, moderate on doubtful questions, and eminently practical. He was no Calvinist, if by that be meant a strong opinion on predestination, and the order of the Divine decrees; but he was a sound heartfelt believer in the revelation of the gospel according to the articles and homilies of the Church of England, of which he was through life a sincere member. I remember, only a few years since, his walking with me up and down his drawing-room some time beyond midnight, discussing on some of these subjects—his figure is now in my mind—his benevolent eye—his kind considerate manner of speaking—his reverence for Scripture—his address—the pauses he made in his walk, when he had any thing emphatic to say. I recollect one sentiment was, that the passages so frequent in Scripture, importing the unwillingness of the Almighty that the sinner should perish, the invitations addressed to him to return, the remonstrances with him on his unbelief, &c., must be interpreted strictly and literally, or they would appear to be a mockery of man's misery, and to involve the most fearful imputations on the Divine character. Evasions of the force of such passages were, he thought, highly injurious,
and went to sap the whole evidence and bearing of the Christian revelation.

He had a delicate yet penetrating and microscopic insight into character. Observations minute, accurate, graphical, and often with a tinge of humour, dropped from him in conversation; and when quiet in his family, he could imitate the voice and manner of the person he was describing, (generally some public man,) in a way to provoke profuse merriment.* Then he would check himself, and throw in some kind remark. His charity, indeed, in judging of others, is a farther trait in his Christian character, which forces itself on my recollection. Of his benevolence I need not speak; but his kind construction of doubtful actions, his charitable language towards those with whom he most widely differed, his thorough forgetfulness of little affronts, were fruits of that general benevolence which continually appeared. The only occasion beyond that playful humour to which I have referred, when he spoke with severity, was on the spirit and conduct of a persecutor, or of a churchman who had amassed riches for his family, without having been remarkable for the discharge of any one appropriate duty of his high and sacred station.

The writer of these recollections cannot but mention here, that evident maturity and growth in grace which appeared in his beloved friend. When life is running out, and nature decays, then to see the principles of grace more and more vigorous,—the world and its affairs less regarded, the affections more pure and exalted, the duties of religion more delighted in, and gratitude and love evidently preparing the dying Christian for a world of love and holiness; these are evidences, indeed, of growth in inward religion. Such was the temper of Mr. Wilberforce.

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the points of a difficult debate, and putting his case, were also so admirable, that some of his oldest friends have told me they never could understand how he managed it.

The failings of his character were weaknesses rather than faults. They were on the side of hesitation, delay, indecision, discursiveness, and vagrancy of mind; the allowing himself to be imposed upon — disorder in his papers and correspondence—irregularity of hours—his library a perfect Babylon — letters, thousands upon thousands, lying heaped around — half a morning often lost in recovering some important document. But all these were nothing—they flowed from his cast of character, and were perfectly understood and allowed for by all who knew him.

One thing, after all, was remarkable amidst this discursiveness; he knew exactly where to place himself—what to undertake — what decline — what objects to pursue; — and, therefore, all he did, throughout a long life, told, and told with increasing force, in the cause of humanity and religion.

To attempt any outline of the bearings of this extraordinary man’s protracted and honourable course upon the general interests of religion and the welfare of his country, is beyond the powers of the present writer. He knew him personally only for the last twenty-four years; but that intimacy has traced, in indelible lines, his various excellencies upon his heart. He admired others,—he loved Wilberforce. His influence upon his age was prodigious! Fifty-three years—and such years!—at such a crisis! from 1780 to 1833—with such a revival of Christianity going on — such noble institutions formed and matured — such a front put upon real, vital, scriptural piety — such an improved state of religious feeling in all ranks, from the highest to the lowest — such a gradual elevation of the character of bishops and clergy — such an acknowledgment and avowal of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel — such a commencement of the illumination of the Heathen and Mahommedan world — such means set to work for the instruction of the young, and for the relief and recovery of every species of wretchedness! But enumeration is impossible. Nor will the writer trust himself to say how much of all this may be traced to that statesman who by his writings vindicated the Gospel, by his life exemplified its precepts, and by his benevolence commended its excellency; who swayed, gradually, much of the opinion of Europe as to religion; who lived to accomplish the greatest enterprise of benevolence which it ever fell to mortal hand to undertake; who was in a position which no other senator in our age has occupied; uniting in himself the various influences of the orator, statesman, and the Christian; who has raised the character of our country by associating Christianity more than ever with the love and affections of mankind; and who, dying in a private station, and after years of retirement from public service, was compelled to occupy in his death the niche of honour amongst the great and good of Britain, which neither he nor his family for an instant contemplated; and thus to exhibit the first example of a grateful country returning with all the sacred solemnities of a public funeral, and assembling, in the persons of her most exalted characters in church and state, around the remains of one, of whom it was only necessary to say, when interred by the hand of national gratitude, that he was

BORN AUGUST 16, 1758,

AND

DIED JULY 19, 1833.

The mind repays, with delightful satisfaction, in the contemplation of the Christian excellencies of Mr. Wilberforce, in whatever relation he appears, and acceptable and gratifying as the preceding notice of this truly estimable man will be to all who can appreciate his worth, the Editor cannot deny himself the pleasure of adding the following letter from Mr. Wilberforce, to his friend the Rev. W. Jay of Bath, written not very long before his decease:

The lovely view in which it stands was the simple inscription on his tomb.
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AND
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Sends was the simple inscription on his tomb.
places the candour, humility, and affection, of Mr. Wilberforce in the prospect of his removal to the heavenly state, will, he is persuaded, secure for it a very favourable reception.

"Elmdon House near Birmingham,
Dec. 30th, 1831.

"MY DEAR SIR,

"Though I will not withhold from Mrs. Wilberforce the pleasure she will have in answering your friendly letter; I cannot be satisfied without assuring you with my own pen, that I feel honoured as well as gratified by the proof of your esteem and regard for me, which you give by desiring to place my name at the head of your new publication. It gives me unaffected pleasure to reflect that my name will be thus permanently associated with yours. And may this, my dear Sir, with all your other labours of love, be abundantly blessed. May the gracious Giver of all good, who has already rendered you an instrument of such extensive usefulness, continue to prosper your endeavours to promote the temporal, and still more, the eternal benefit of your fellow-creatures; and after a long protracted course of usefulness and honour, may you at length have addressed to you those blessed words, "Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of your Lord.""

"Suffer me to add my humble prayer, and let me hope it will be sometimes yours also, that I may one day welcome you into that better world, and that though by somewhat different paths, yet tending to the same point and gravitating (if I may use the expression) to the same centre. We may at last meet where holiness and happiness, where love and grace, and gratitude and joy, will be unalloyed and everlasting.

"Such my dear Sir, is my sincere wish, and sometimes shall be the prayer for you and for all that are most dear to you, of

"Yours, with cordial esteem
And attachment,

"Rev. W. Jay."

"W. WILBERFORCE."

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THE TRUE CHURCH.

BY JOSIAH CONDER.

One Church,—Tho' bigots fight and sceptics scorn
To view the unholy strife
The Church is one, the Church of the new-born,
Who draw from Christ their life.
One race, from Adam sprung, have peopled earth:
The heirs of heaven are one by second birth.

Diverse in feature, fortune, temper, hue,
In robes or rags disguised,
Yet to their head were each in spirit true,
As to one Lord baptized.
Then would they as one body feel allied,
And deem him brother for whom Christ has died.

Yet are they not one body? Sceptic, learn;
Divided as they be,
Still with one spirit all the pious burn:
As one they bow the knee
To God in Christ; one hope divine is theirs.
Oh, there is unity in good men's prayers.

For the one Church is not the aggregate
Of churches or of sects;
But of the faithful, those whose happy state
Each with the Head connects:
O come the day when every sect shall fall,
And Christ, the living Head, be all in all!